



***Southwest Washington
Regional Transportation Council***

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS

October 2, 2001

Published by:

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I. PREFACE

Public involvement is a key component of the regional transportation decision-making process. As mandated in the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) and other supporting Federal regulations, and continued in the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) must establish and periodically review and update public involvement processes. These processes should assure early and continued public awareness of and access to the transportation decision-making process. Involving the public is a major challenge, especially in the regional transportation planning process, which is inherently complex, has a long time horizon, and is focused on transportation system-level planning rather than actual project design and construction. The following pages describe Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council's (RTC's) public involvement process:

II. INTRODUCTION:

Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council (RTC) serves as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for Clark County, Washington and as Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) for Clark, Klickitat and Skamania Counties in Washington State. The involvement of the public in regional transportation planning and programming has been part of RTC's work program since the Council was established in July of 1992.

The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 required that MPO's adopt a formal public involvement process relating to regional transportation planning and programming of transportation projects in the MPO region¹. The original public involvement plan was adopted by the RTC Board of Directors in July, 1994. The adopted procedures also meet Washington State's requirements regarding public involvement and the regional transportation planning activities of the Regional Transportation Planning Organization.

III. GOALS:

Establish consistent public involvement procedures to accomplish the following:

- Maintain a proactive public involvement process.
- Support early and continuous involvement of the public in developing Regional Transportation Plans and Transportation Improvement

¹ Appendix A contains relevant sections relating to public involvement within the metropolitan region from the *Federal Register, Statewide Planning; Metropolitan Planning; Rule*. (October 28, 1993). For non-MPO regions, it is the State's responsibility to establish a public involvement process. In Washington State, the RTPO's will coordinate closely with the State in implementing public involvement procedures for the non-MPO regions.



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Programs.

- Provide timely information about transportation issues and processes to citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agency employees, private providers of transportation, other interested parties and segments of the community affected by transportation plans, programs and projects.
- Provide reasonable public access to technical and policy information used in development of plans and programs.
- Provide adequate public notice of public involvement activities.
- Provide time for public review and comment at key decision points in approval of plans and programs.
- Consider and respond to public suggestions and recommendations received during the planning and development processes.
- Identify and address the transportation needs of the traditionally underserved, including low income and minority populations and effects of transportation policies, plans and projects on these populations².

IV. PROCEDURES:

RTC will utilize a broad range of public information and participation opportunities in planning for regional transportation needs and programming of regional transportation projects. RTC recognizes the importance of public involvement at the local level and will note public input resulting from local transportation planning and project programming. RTC's public involvement procedures are described below.

a. Meetings

- RTC has established committees to ensure coordination of the regional transportation planning and programming process. Meetings of the Regional Transportation Advisory Committee, Regional Transportation Policy Committee for Klickitat County and Regional Transportation Policy Committee for Skamania County are all open to the public. These committee meetings are held once per month and are the forum for discussion and development of regional transportation planning and programming of transportation projects.
- RTC Board meetings are also held once per month and are open to the public. Time is allocated at each meeting for citizen communication. The RTC Board is the formal decision-making body for matters relating to regional transportation planning activities. The Board has the authority to adopt regional transportation plans and programs.
- Key components and stages in the development of the Metropolitan

² See Appendix section on Executive Order 12898 (Environmental Justice).



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Transportation Plan (MTP) will be discussed by the committees described above. During the MTP's development at least one public meeting will be held to solicit public suggestions and recommendations on the draft Plan. The MTP is to be updated periodically³ but at least one public meeting will be held annually to inform the public of the Plan's status and allow for public input.

- Development of the Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program (MTIP) will also be discussed by the RTC committees noted above. RTC staff will participate in and support efforts of the local agencies in developing their local improvement programs. In selecting projects to be included in the MTIP, RTC will consider the input of the public. Public comment on the draft regional MTIP will be sought at a formal public meeting which may be held in conjunction with the public meeting relating to the MTP, as described above.
- RTC representatives and staff will support public involvement activities of local and state jurisdictions. RTC representation will be ensured at relevant local, regional and state public meetings on matters relating to transportation.
- RTC will coordinate closely with Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) in public involvement relating to the State's transportation planning and programming activities. Where opportunities arise, public meetings relating to the MTP and MTIP will be combined with public meetings relating to the State's transportation plans and State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).

b. Information

- Notice of the RTC Board, MTP and MTIP public meetings outlined above will be published in local newspapers within the region and on RTC's web site.
- Any regional transportation planning reports and documents of interest to the public will be available to the public for reference at RTC and on the RTC web site to allow for public access to the information. Free public access to the Worldwide Web is available at the public libraries within the region.
- In addition, the following tools are used to improve public involvement: Stakeholder Outreach, Web Site, Media Contact, Newsletters, Public Meetings, Open Houses, Citizen Advisory Committees, Surveys, Speaker Bureaus, Regional Coordination, and Workshops. Appendix B explains in greater detail the strategies and techniques listed above.

³ The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act requires that regional plans within the MPO region are updated every three years.



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c. Public Input

- When significant written and oral comments on the draft transportation plan or TIP are received from the public, a summary, analysis and report on the comments will be made a part of the final Plan and TIP. Within the MPO region, significant comments resulting from the interagency consultation process required under the United States Environmental Protection Agency's air quality conformity regulations will also be included in the final Plan and TIP.
- If the final transportation Plan or TIP differs significantly from the one made available for public comment and raises new material issues which interested parties could not reasonably have foreseen from the public involvement efforts, an additional opportunity for public comment on the revised plan or TIP will be made available.

d. Effectiveness

- RTC will periodically review public involvement processes to assess their effectiveness in assuring full and open access to the public to the RTC's decision-making.

V. AMENDMENT TO ADOPTED PROCEDURES:

- Proposed amendments to the adopted public involvement procedures will be placed on the RTC Board's agenda for the Board's consideration prior to the required public comment period.
- There will be a minimum forty-five (45) day public comment period before any amendment to public involvement process and procedures is adopted by the RTC Board.

VI. ADOPTION PROCESS

- The public involvement process and procedures were originally adopted by the RTC Board of Directors on July 5th, 1994. An updated version of the public involvement process and procedures was adopted at the October 2, 2001 RTC Board meeting.

COMMENTS

Comments on the public involvement process should be addressed to:

RTC
1351 Officers' Row
Vancouver, WA 98661;
Phone (360) 397-6067
info@rtc.wa.gov

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APPENDIX A

**From Federal Register, *Statewide Planning; Metropolitan Planning; Rule.*
October 28, 1993**

METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING, SUB-PART C

§450.316, Metropolitan Transportation Planning Process: Elements

(15)(b) In addition, the metropolitan transportation planning process shall:

- (1) Include a proactive public involvement process that provides complete information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and supports early and continuing involvement of the public in developing plans and TIPs and meets the requirements and criteria specified as follows:
 - (i) Require a minimum public comment period of 45 days before the public involvement process is initially adopted or revised;
 - (ii) Provide timely information about transportation issues and processes to citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agency employees, private providers of transportation, other interested parties and segments of the community affected by transportation plans, programs and projects (including but not limited to central city and other local jurisdiction concerns);
 - (iii) Provide reasonable public access to technical and policy information used in the development of plans and TIPs and open public meetings where matters related to the Federal aid highway and transit programs are being considered;
 - (iv) Require adequate public notice of public involvement activities and time for public review and comment at key decision points, including, but not limited to, approval of plans and TIPs
 - (v) Demonstrate explicit consideration and response to public input received during the planning and program development processes;
 - (vi) Seek out and consider the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, including, but not limited to, low-income and minority households;
 - (vii) When significant written and oral comments are received on the draft transportation plan or TIP (including the financial plan) as a result of the public involvement process or the interagency consultation process required under the U.S. EPA's conformity regulations, a summary, analysis and report on the disposition of comments shall be made part of the final plan and TIP;
 - (viii) If the final transportation plan or TIP differs significantly from the one which was made available for public comment by the MPO and raises new material issues which interested parties could not reasonably have foreseen from the public involvement efforts, an additional opportunity for public comment on the revised plan or TIP shall be made available;
 - (ix) Public involvement processes shall be periodically reviewed by the MPO in terms of their effectiveness in assuring that the process provides full and open access to all;
 - (x) These procedures will be reviewed by the FHWA and FTA during certification reviews for TMAs, and as otherwise necessary for all MPOs, to assure that full and open access is provided to MPO decision-making processes;
 - (xi) Metropolitan public involvement processes shall be coordinated with statewide public involvement processes wherever possible to enhance public consideration of the issues, plan and programs, and reduce redundancies and costs.

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§450.322, Metropolitan transportation Planning Process: Transportation Plan

- (c) There must be adequate opportunity for public officials (including elected officials) and citizen involvement in the development of the transportation plan before it is approved by the MPO, in accordance with the requirements of §450.316(b)(1). Such procedures shall include opportunities for interested parties (including citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agency employees, and private providers of transportation) to be involved in the early stages of the plan development/update process. The procedures shall include publication of the proposed plan or other methods to make it readily available for public review and comment and, in nonattainment TMAs, an opportunity for at least one formal public meeting annually to review planning assumptions and the plan development process with interested parties and the general public. The procedures also shall include publication of the approved plan or other methods to make it readily available for information purposes.

§450.324, Transportation Improvement Program: General

- (c) There must be reasonable opportunity for public comment in accordance with the requirements of § 450.316(b)(1) and, in nonattainment TMAs, an opportunity for at least one formal public meeting during the TIP development process. This public meeting may be combined with the public meeting required under § 450.322(c). The proposed TIP shall be published or otherwise made readily available for review and comment. Similarly, the approved TIP shall be published or otherwise made readily available for information purposes.

Executive Order 12898 (Augments Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964)

Each Federal agency shall make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations. In response, the Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration have renewed their commitments to assure that environmental justice is carried out in the activities of metropolitan planning organizations.

STATEWIDE PLANNING, SUB-PART B

§450.212, Public Involvement

- (b) Public involvement activities carried out in a **metropolitan** area in response to metropolitan planning requirements in § 450.322(c) or § 450.324 (c) may by agreement of the State and the MPO satisfy the requirements of this section.

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PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT TOOLS

APPENDIX B

The following is a list of strategies to be carried out in order to enhance and support public outreach in the regional transportation planning and decision-making process:

A. Stakeholder Outreach

A stakeholder is defined as any person or group that is affected by a transportation plan, program, or project, including those who may not be aware they are affected. Stakeholders include the general public; environmental, health, neighborhood, citizen, and civic organizations; traditionally underserved populations such as people with disabilities, low-income, and racial and ethnic minorities, and affected public agencies. Stakeholders are identified and are included in public outreach activities.

B. Web Site

Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council (RTC) has maintained a web site since 1996. The web site has information about RTC and its activities; regional programs, planning studies, data resources, final reports, and upcoming meetings. The web site also provides an opportunity for the public to provide input and formal comments on an ongoing basis through e-mail links. RTC's web site address is: <http://www.rtc.wa.gov/>

C. Media Contact

Key media shall be provided with periodic updates of RTC activities and projects. News releases shall be disseminated to announce public review and comment periods for RTC's plans, programs, and other activities. RTC maintains a list of media outlets such as television, radio, and newspapers.

D. Newsletters

Project newsletters to keep the public apprised of specific projects are published as needed. These newsletters include information about a project written in language understood by the general public. Newsletters are distributed to identified stakeholders and interested parties.

E. Public Meetings/Open Houses

Public meetings and open houses provide a setting for the public to access information on RTC's planning activities. Information is made available either through presentations by technical staff (public meeting) or through display exhibits (open house).

F. Citizen Advisory Committees

Citizen Advisory Committees are advisory committees to RTC established to provide broad regional community input during the planning process. Citizen Advisory Committees are comprised of individuals representing a cross-section of the region's populations including those with environmental, business, civic organization, neighborhood and other interests.

G. Surveys

Surveys are a tool to gather information on peoples' perceptions, preferences, and practices. Surveys can range from being informal and inexpensive to scientific and costly. The information

being sought and the use of that information in the regional transportation planning process will also vary.

H. Speaker's Bureaus

Speaker Bureaus shall consist of RTC staff and citizen volunteers who can speak to civic groups, professional organizations, neighborhood associations, and other groups about the regional transportation planning process and activities.

I. Regional Coordination

RTC staff will coordinate with member jurisdictions and agencies to help outreach to a larger number of people. Combining resources to publicize activities and events will help RTC to reach a broader audience and will help to promote best practices both for public outreach and for transportation planning and project implementation. Examples of this coordination include combined presentations with other local, regional and state transportation jurisdictions and agencies at regional malls and County Fairs.

J. Workshops

Information workshops are held on topics associated with the regional transportation planning process. Such workshops are designed to educate participants on specific topics such as regional transportation modeling, intelligent transportation systems, etc. Information workshops are conducted on an as-needed basis.

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